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PROGRAMME PRIORITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF UNFPA IN LIGHT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Interim report of the Executive Director

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a preliminary analysis of the programme priorities and future directions of UNFPA in light of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was held in Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 September 1994. A more comprehensive report on this topic will be submitted to the Executive Board at its annual meeting in June 1995, as requested by the Governing Council in decision 93/27 A, paragraph 12.

I. BACKGROUND

2. The population situation in many developing countries has shown considerable improvement during the past 25 years: fertility levels and crude death rates have declined, and life expectancy at birth has increased by nearly 20 per cent, from 52 years in 1969 to 62 years today. Overall, the health of women and children is improving, and contraceptive prevalence has increased -- from around 14 per cent in 1960-1965 to an estimated 56.8 per cent of women of reproductive age in 1994.

3. UNFPA has played a catalytic role in bringing about these improvements. It has actively promoted the importance of population issues within the context of social and economic development, particularly among political and religious leaders and policy makers. This has contributed to, among many other things, increased understanding of and support for population activities, at both the global and national level; the integration of family planning into maternal and child health care services and, more recently, its integration into the broader framework of reproductive health care; and the establishment of national population policy and planning units or

commissions, which in turn has facilitated government efforts to integrate population concerns into development plans and strategies. UNFPA has also actively promoted the importance of empowering women and of involving community groups in the development and implementation of population programmes.

4. Despite these and many other accomplishments, however, a number of issues still require concerted and coordinated action. This is evident in the comprehensive Programme of Action that was adopted at the ICPD. This report examines some of the policy and programme implications of the Programme of Action for UNFPA, in particular as they relate to the policy orientations, programme focus, and programming strategies of the Fund.

II. POLICY ORIENTATIONS

5. The Programme of Action represents a major departure from conventional thinking on population and development. The international community has, for the first time, gone beyond mere numbers of human beings and demographic targets and explicitly placed human beings at the centre of all population and development activities. Investing in people, in their health and education, is seen as the key to sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The population dimension is thus no longer seen in isolation, but in conjunction with overall development strategies, in particular with efforts to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development, and empower women to participate fully in the development of society.

6. The Programme of Action recommends a set of important population and development objectives, as well as qualitative and quantitative goals that are mutually supportive of those objectives. UNFPA is committed to helping developing countries achieve those objectives and goals, particularly those that relate to providing universal access to reproductive health and family planning services; reducing infant, child and maternal mortality; ensuring access to primary education for all girls and boys; and bringing about gender equity and equality.

7. The Programme of Action has specific implications for UNFPA's policy orientations. Perhaps first and foremost is the need to base population programmes on individuals' needs and desires rather than on demographic targets and to place paramount importance on ensuring quality of care. Both must be translated into actions that fully respect the principles of free and informed choice. This requires, among other things, improving the quality of training in reproductive health and related areas; expanding the range and quality of services; and promoting the greater involvement of national and subnational NGOs and women's groups in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes, as well as the increased use of socio-cultural research to develop training and information, education and communication (IEC) programmes.

8. Another important policy concern is to consolidate and deepen development partnerships at both the national and international levels. The aim is two-fold: to maximize the impact of development cooperation by taking advantage of an effective division of labour and of the specific areas of competence of the various partners (government, non-governmental, private sector, multilateral, bilateral); and to ensure a greater level of national and local participation in and ownership of population and development programmes. This will also greatly facilitate UNFPA's efforts to address two related policy concerns: (a) to ensure that the broad-based support and sense

of ownership generated by the ICPD for population and development programmes is maintained, nurtured and expanded; and (b) to help create an environment conducive to formulating and implementing integrated population and development programmes.

III. PROGRAMME FOCUS

9. Prior to the ICPD, UNFPA provided support to countries through a "comprehensive" country-programme approach, which typically, if not always, extended assistance to seven specific programme areas (formally called work-plan categories): (a) maternal and child health and family planning (MCH/FP); (b) information, education and communication (IEC); (c) data collection and analysis; (d) population policy formulation; (e) population dynamics; (f) women, population and development; and (g) special programmes, including, inter alia, youth, ageing, and population and environment.

10. Based on the content and direction of the Programme of Action and in view of the recommendations of internal and external assessments of UNFPA's programme, the Fund proposes to adopt a thematic, rather than sectoral, approach to help focus its assistance. Such an approach will focus primarily on three major themes: (a) reproductive health and family planning; (b) gender, population and development; and (c) population and sustainable development. UNFPA resources will likewise be programmed in a more focused manner using the ICPD goals as criteria to determine the type and extent of support.

11. The aim would be to develop a holistic approach in addressing the specific population and development situation in each country. This would imply, inter alia, that where well-established family planning programmes exist, such programmes can serve as the basis for a primary health care system that includes expanded reproductive health care. All special programmes that in the past may have had a vertical structure would now become an integral part of a broader and more comprehensive programme. The activities in the area of reproductive health would concentrate on improving upon traditional maternal and child health services by adopting a more comprehensive reproductive health care approach that includes family planning. The longer term goal would be to provide a comprehensive set of quality reproductive health care services covering all stages of people's lives, from adolescence through adulthood.

12. Within the broader framework of reproductive health care, UNFPA will give increased attention to activities to improve maternal health and reduce maternal mortality and morbidity; to improve adolescent reproductive health; to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); to reduce reproductive tract infections and infertility; and to eliminate harmful traditional practices against girls and women. UNFPA will also work closely with other co-sponsoring organizations (UNESCO, WHO, World Bank, UNICEF and UNDP) in implementing the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

13. Initial consultations organized by UNFPA have recommended that advocacy directed at policy makers, programme managers, service providers and clients is both urgent and essential to translate the concept of reproductive health, including family planning, into effective action. Such advocacy and action should reflect the specific context of each country. The consultations further recommended that: (a) countries must establish a clear priority in sequencing the introduction of

reproductive health, taking into account the size of the country's reproductive health programme, the availability of resources and the expected impact on public health; (b) communities must take the initiative in designing and implementing reproductive health programmes in order to sustain a broad, but essential, sense of programme ownership; and (c) countries must build quality-control mechanisms into their programmes and define new indicators for programme evaluation. The consultations emphasized that programmes should also focus on adolescents and men, primarily through innovative messages and education, and that training should be a key strategy. They also noted the importance of close cooperation with other United Nations and non-governmental organizations, in particular WHO, especially in developing new technical guidelines and effective training programmes.

14. The Programme of Action gives UNFPA a broader scope in terms of women, population and development activities, especially as concerns advocacy in all areas relating to improving the status of women. The Fund will thus actively advocate a holistic approach to empowering women, integrating efforts to improve women's health, literacy and education, both formal and vocational, with wider efforts to reduce social, legal, cultural and economic disparities based on gender. Such an approach will focus on providing reproductive health services for poor and disadvantaged women, while seeking to improve their ability to earn income and obtain credit. Other priority areas for UNFPA will include IEC efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child, eliminate traditional harmful practices against girls and women, and increase male responsibility for reproductive health and family planning.

15. The scope of activities in the area of population and sustainable development policy should be broadened and linked with efforts in the areas of health, education, family planning, the condition of women, poverty alleviation and the environment -- the aim being to make population policy truly an integral part of all other efforts towards sustainable development. This will require support for data collection and analysis, relevant socio-cultural and operations research, the creation and maintenance of relevant databases and support for policy formulation.

16. These activities will be supplemented and complemented by pertinent IEC activities, data collection and analysis, and socio-cultural and operations research. In all of these activities, special attention will be given to gender issues. For example, in the population education activities it supports, UNFPA will focus on changing gender-based stereotypes; in data collection and analysis activities, the Fund will emphasize the use of gender-sensitive indicators.

17. UNFPA will work closely with countries to monitor progress made in implementing the Programme of Action and achieving ICPD goals. UNFPA will thus encourage and help countries to formulate national ICPD action plans to translate pertinent provisions of the Programme of Action into actions at the national level. These plans will also provide a useful mechanism to carry out regular reviews of the progress made. The formulation of such action plans will involve setting national goals and objectives in conjunction with the Programme of Action; establishing intermediate outputs and activities required to reach these goals; determining the costs and identifying the required financing; and dividing the responsibilities for implementing the plan among the various government and non-governmental organizations and the private-sector.

18. UNFPA will also work with its development partners in monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action within the context of a common and integrated framework for following up on the various international conferences on sustainable development. The Fund will help countries define and implement streamlined, sector-based monitoring mechanisms with the aims of alleviating the reporting burden on countries and of building national capacity. A particular challenge in the follow-up to the ICPD is to define innovative indicators that adequately reflect the new aspects contained in the Programme of Action, in addition to the more traditional demographic and programme indicators already in use.

19. UNFPA will continue to play a strong role in support of resource mobilization in accordance with agreements reached at the ICPD. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has requested the UNFPA Executive Director to undertake on his behalf the consultations called for in paragraph 16.28 of the Programme of Action, which invites the Secretary-General "to consult with the various bodies of the United Nations system, as well as with international financial institutions and various bilateral aid organizations and agencies, with a view to promoting an exchange of information among them on the requirements for international assistance and to reviewing, on a regular basis, the specific needs of countries in the field of population and development, including emergency and temporary needs, and maximizing the availability of resources and their most effective utilization". The Executive Director will accordingly convene the first such high-level consultation in early 1995.

IV. PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES

20. To enable UNFPA to respond adequately to the challenges contained in the Programme of Action, the Fund proposes to undertake a number of measures to further strengthen its programming strategies. These measures fall into four broad but closely related areas:

(a) Accelerating the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199 and related programming measures, with an emphasis on building up national capacity to undertake national execution of programmes and projects;

(b) Expanding collaboration with and promoting coordination among UNFPA's development partners both within and outside the United Nations system and in particular with governments and non-governmental organizations;

(c) Sharpening the strategic focus of UNFPA's assistance in line with ICPD goals;

(d) Upgrading the Fund's capacity to deliver its programme and to provide quality services and technical assistance.

21. Implementing resolution 47/199. UNFPA continues to pursue initiatives in support of Fund- and system-wide implementation of resolution 47/199. The measures being taken emphasize field-level action and include efforts, inter alia, to harmonize programming cycles and procedures among United Nations funds and programmes; to decentralize programme and financial approval authority to field offices; to provide support to expand the capacity of countries to undertake national execution; and to formulate a systematic plan for establishing common premises for United Nations country offices.

22. The aim of these and various other measures is to enable UNFPA and the United Nations system as a whole to respond more effectively and cohesively to the development priorities and needs of developing countries. Such measures, therefore, must not only be continued but be accelerated and pursued in a more strategic fashion. This requires that UNFPA work very closely with recipient governments in determining how best to integrate pertinent actions called for in the ICPD Programme of Action into the countries' overall strategic framework for development. It also requires that the Fund intensify its efforts to drastically streamline programming procedures and to make the transition from a "project approach" to a more "thematic and programme-oriented approach", both of which are in line with resolution 47/199 and respond better to the challenges raised by the ICPD.

23. At the same time, UNFPA will further overhaul its programme monitoring systems -- financial, managerial and technical -- to ensure more timely, accurate and meaningful reporting on programme activities. This complex task, which is already under way at UNFPA, requires close cooperation among the various parties involved in the formulation and implementation of UNFPA-funded activities, particularly those at the national level. Following a careful review of current systems in each country, the Fund will streamline and upgrade its monitoring procedures, drawing increasingly on the enhanced capacity that on-line electronic communications and management information systems (MIS) now provide.

24. Expanding collaboration and coordination. Collaboration and coordination among all development partners both within and outside the United Nations system are clearly central to the effective implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. UNFPA will therefore pursue a multi-pronged strategy to expand and promote such collaboration and coordination. The Fund will, for example, continue to work closely with its partner agencies and organizations in the United Nations system -- including, inter alia, the United Nations and its regional commissions, the ILO, FAO, UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, UNDP, UNIFEM, IFAD, and the international financial institutions -- in giving increased priority to assisting countries in building the necessary capacity to undertake national execution.

25. As regards the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action by United Nations agencies and organizations, the UNFPA Executive Director will, as requested by the Administrator of UNDP on behalf of the Secretary-General, convene a Task Force on ICPD Follow-Up. This Task Force, which holds its initial planning meeting in December 1994, will seek to ensure a coordinated and effective follow-up within the United Nations system. Such a task force is in line with the suggestion contained in the Secretary-General's Agenda for Development to make greater use of small, high-level task forces to examine critical development issues and to develop joint programmes based on common policies for implementation at the country level. It will also contribute to the development of a common framework to follow up on United Nations conferences, as was also called for in the Agenda for Development. UNFPA will do all it can to promote collaboration and coordination to ensure the most effective system-wide implementation of the provisions of the Programme of Action, in accordance with and in active support of the provisions contained in the resolution on the ICPD adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

26. UNFPA will also expand collaboration with NGOs, especially national NGOs, and the private-sector in its programme activities. Although UNFPA was one of the first United Nations

organizations to make effective use of NGOs in programme implementation, the time has come to make this a more systematic and significant element of the Fund's programme. The Fund is therefore in the process of revising its guidelines covering UNFPA collaboration with NGOs, which will henceforth include provisions to fund NGO projects both within and beyond the framework of UNFPA country programmes. This will include a block allocation for NGO activities at national, regional and international levels. Moreover, UNFPA plans to help establish NGO Advisory Committees at global, national and subnational levels.

27. Sharpening UNFPA's strategic focus. In order to sharpen the strategic focus of its limited programme funds, the Fund must revise its current system of resource allocation. Towards this end, the Fund proposes to use pertinent ICPD goals for the year 2015 as a basis for determining the nature of its programme support. For example, in countries that are already close to achieving the goals set forth in the Programme of Action, or have even surpassed them, UNFPA would provide more focused technical assistance to address specific needs rather than to extend assistance for a comprehensive country programme. In this way, the Fund can concentrate its assistance to such countries either on selected issues requiring further attention or on selected geographical areas that lag significantly behind the national average on the ICPD goals. UNFPA would also provide assistance to these countries to help them share their expertise and experiences with other countries through South-South cooperation.

28. On the other hand, in countries that show the widest gaps between their present levels and the ICPD goals, UNFPA will continue to provide assistance for more comprehensive country programmes. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa and least developed countries in other regions would benefit most from this type of support.

29. Such an approach would allow UNFPA to focus its assistance on the specific needs of a given country, as has been recommended by various reviews of UNFPA's programme. It would also enable the Fund to target its financial support to components directly related to the population package as defined in the ICPD Programme of Action. In addition, UNFPA proposes to provide support to help create the type of environment, both globally and nationally, that is necessary to sustain population and development programmes. This support would be extended mainly in the form of advocacy for the broader goals of the ICPD, in particular as they relate to sustainable human development. Such support would be carefully linked with the action programmes funded by other partners in the United Nations system and by bilateral donors. While the majority of UNFPA support will be for country activities, selected support will be required at the intercountry level, for example for training and some types of research.

30. Upgrading programme delivery. To enable the Fund to respond to the current needs in the population and development field as well as to play the leadership role expected of it in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, it is crucial to further strengthen UNFPA's capacity to deliver its programme and to provide high-quality services and technical support. The Fund is the largest multilateral organization in the field of population and development, and it has notable strengths it can draw on, including a field presence of dedicated and able professionals, an innovative system of country support teams providing multisectoral technical assistance, and over 25 years of solid programme experience. It is a trusted and valued development partner of countries in all regions. Nevertheless, its capacity is limited. Recent independent evaluations of UNFPA, as

well as its own assessments, conclude that UNFPA is already seriously overstretched, particularly at the field level. The effective implementation of UNFPA programmes will require, among other things, the strengthening of UNFPA staffing capacity.

31. For a number of reasons, over the last few years, UNFPA has not fully expended its annual programme resources. While much of this is due to the continued uncertainty concerning the availability of resources, other contributing factors are being vigorously addressed by UNFPA management, and further efforts are required. For example, certain managerial practices will be further streamlined, including simplifying management decisions and actions both at headquarters and in the field.

32. In addition to a number of steps that the UNFPA management intends to pursue to help improve programme management and delivery, it is of utmost importance that UNFPA's country office staffing capacity be adequately addressed. Such a response may require a number of measures, including revision of regular staffing patterns as well as use of temporary support staff. While UNFPA has always emphasized staff training, these efforts will need to be further expanded, including orientation for the staff about the new requirements embodied in the ICPD Programme of Action.

V. RECOMMENDATION

33. The Executive Board may wish to take note of the Executive Director's interim report on Programme priorities and future directions of UNFPA in light of the ICPD (DP/1995/8), bearing in mind the comments made during the Board's deliberations on the report, and reiterate the request contained in Governing Council decision 93/27 A, paragraph 12, of 18 June 1993, that the Executive Director report on her proposals on programme priorities and future directions of UNFPA to the annual session of the Executive Board in June 1995.